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ABSTRACT

This paper presents the findings of an ethnographic study of a state-run and state-funded remediation program for economically disadvantaged adolescents. The program's main purpose was to reintegrate students defined as "at risk" of dropping out back into their schools. The program, the Ordered School Reinforcement Program (OSRP), was implemented at two sites: one comprised primarily of African-American adolescents in a small northeastern city; and the other comprised entirely of white adolescents in a working-class suburb of that city. Methods included observation, document analysis, and interviews with staff, students, parents, and state employers. The state, program staff, parents, and casual observers overwhelmingly viewed the program as a success. However, the data indicate that the program lacked adequate resources to meet its stated objective of helping students achieve academic success. Why was the program viewed as a success when it failed to meet its goals? Despite the staff's sincere motives, staff tended to blame the victims for their own inadequate socialization. By assuming an individual-deficit model, the state failed to directly confront the systematic ways in which public education itself disadvantages disempowered groups, making compensatory education necessary in the first place. Solutions may lie in restructuring mainstream educational programs, rather than in providing integrative assistance to failures and potential failures. In conclusion, the OSRP exemplifies America's ambivalence about providing help to the poor. On the one hand, Americans want to believe that hard work, an independent spirit and goal-directed behavior can earn everyone a piece of the middle class pie. On the other hand, Americans are aware from experiences like plant closing, the 1930's depression, the recent recession, and market declines that individuals cannot control all the social and economic forces around them. The program symbolizes America's inability to face the issue of welfare policy. (LMI)

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The State as Equalizer: Who is Helping Whom?

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This paper explores the findings of an ethnographic study of a state-run and state-funded 'street-level bureaucracy': a remediation program for economically 'disadvantaged' adolescents. This after-school program seeks to resocialize the young people within it, all of whom have been defined by their schools as being 'at-risk' of dropping out. The program's main purpose is to reintegrate the students back into their schools. My observations raise serious questions about the effectiveness of the program in terms of meeting its own objectives. In contrast, the state, program staff, parents and casual observers all seem to view the program in positive terms. This paper asks why there is a disjunction between these two radically different evaluations of this program. In answering this question, two conflicting perspectives of the relationship between the state and its poorest and most powerless citizens are explored.

SETTING AND METHODS

I spent January to July, 1992, observing and interviewing the staff and teenage students of a program for at-risk adolescents that I have called 'Ordered School Reinforcement Program' (OSRP). The program takes place on two sites: one made up primarily of African-American adolescents in River City, a small northeastern U.S. city; the other is an all-white group, located in Springfield, a neighboring working class suburb of that city. The 33 students in the program are between 14 and 17 years of age, with the majority being 15 or 16 years old. The students must meet state-mandated financial guidelines in order to qualify for the program: they are all located below the official 'poverty line', with the vast majority of their families collecting public assistance.

As the state curriculum guidelines describe it, the program assists these young people by providing them with activities that are primarily career-oriented. OSRP attempts to show students the relationship between schooling and careers, tries to develop personal vocational goals, as well as obtain actual on-the-job experience. Students are paid the state's minimum hourly wage

for participation in program activities.

In completing this study, I relied heavily on the qualitative methodology developed by Bogdan and Biklen (1992) and Straus (1987). The focus in this methodology is on inductive analysis, description, and subjects' perceptions, as guided by a set of loosely-framed questions. I observed the program's classroom sessions, field trips, and job experiences. In addition, I collected documents and conducted in-depth interviews with staff, students, parents and employers of the students.

POSITIVE EVALUATIONS

The data indicate that the state, the staff and the community perceive the program to be a success. In evaluating OSRP, the state gathers its own data with respect to performances and outcomes, keeps in regular touch with the program director, and completes an annual on-site inspection. However, before considering the outcomes of these formal evaluations, it is important to understand the goals and objectives which the state has for the program, as stated in its curriculum guide:[1]:

> The Ordered School Reinforcement Program (OSRP) was developed to address the needs of *disadvantaged* 14- to 19-year-old youth, particularly those *at-risk* for dropping out of school. The specific objectives of the OSR Program are to improve participants':
>
> 1. basic education skills,
> 2. vocational and career direction, and
> 3. work maturity.
>
> The program seeks to achieve these objectives by engaging participants in a course of study that involves classroom instruction, remedial support, counseling, employment

[1] Although I have quoted directly from the state guidelines, these and other documents that reveal location will not be properly referenced in the interest of maintaining confidentiality.

assistance, personal development activities, and individual work exploration. Through these immediate objectives, the program is intended to:

1. facilitate participant acquisition of a *high school diploma* or its equivalent,
2. prepare participants for entry into *post-secondary education*, and
3. prepare participants for the attainment of gainful employment. (Italics added)

According to these objectives, the program identifies and admits only young people who are "disadvantaged" and "at-risk." It then gives them the opportunity of spending a year within OSRP, where the program works mainly on developing their work skills, gives them educational remediation (e.g. in literacy and numeracy), and helps to develop each participant's vocational direction. The expected outcome of this process is improved 'life-chances' in sociological terms, commencing with improved chances of obtaining a high school diploma and going on to post-secondary education. In short, the program hopes to address the two criteria that are used as qualifications for entrance: students' at-risk status in school and their present state of economic disadvantage. The belief is that the presentation of this opportunity will make a difference in these young peoples' future educational and occupational lives.

As the state evaluates this program, it is functioning on an exceptional level, it is "the model program for the state." Consider some of the written comments from the state inspector following his yearly evaluation visit:

> Students interviewed expressed satisfaction with the program and they believe the program has helped them increase grades as reflected on report cards.
>
> Staff appears to be highly motivated and have a great deal of enthusiasm towards the students and the program.

The program is sensitive to and emphasizes meeting the individual needs of the participants.

Quality work was observed in participants' folders.

I have articulated over and over that the River City/Springfield OSR Program is the model program for the state. . . Your diligence and team work definitely paid off.

Congratulations for having a successful program year!

OSRP staff see the program's goals in a manner that is quite close to the formal state objectives expressed above. They see the program as an opportunity which the participants can use to achieve success in school and in a future career. Stanley is the 'site administrator', which means that he is the person in charge of overseeing a number of educational and vocational programs for low income earners, including OSRP. He advises and guides the program director on matters related to goals (both financial and philosophical).

Stanley: And what I'm trying to say is I think, you know, programs like OSRP are there as a beacon of hope. It's somewhere you can go and hopefully think a little bit more positive about your future. And what you need to do to take that temporary short-term. . . If you invest hard work over the next four to eight years in your life, the likelihood is that you'll be making this kind of money and be able to afford the following kind of things and move up the economic ladder of success and find happiness. Okay, instead of: If you sit in your neighbourhood and remain on public assistance, and let everyone else determine your future for you, not so much that there's no hope, it's, it's much more challenging as you get older.

Next, consider the ideas that parents hold in relation to the program. Like their children, they focus almost exclusively on the role OSRP attempts to play with respect to careers and school. For most parents, contact with staff is limited after the initial entrance interview, unless the staff perceive there to be particular problems with their child.

Leon's mom: Trying to get them to do their responsibilities that they have, like applying for colleges. To do know that, you know, that no job is easy. You have to work for what you get.

. . .

Terry and Judith's guardian: Oh, I think it's helping them decide what they would like to be. I think it's nice because they're getting a chance to look at different fields and work at them and say, "Ya, this is what I like," or "No, I don't like this." You know, sometimes they make decisions: they want to be a teacher. And they go to [visit a] college, and after they get out, they go, "I don't really want to be a teacher."

. . .

Wateef's dad: Well, the program, as I understand it, was to make them aware of what the real world is like. You know, just don't go through schools just to, you know, try to maybe get out of high school and that's that. You need more education these days. It's to really push them forward to, you know, not just settle with high school. Go on to college or you know, whatever field they would like to go into.

The dual OSRP themes of career and school have established themselves in the thinking of these parents. They understand the program as one that helps their children comprehend the world of work, set a possible career aspiration, and teach a work ethic or sense of responsibility. Some mention the role the program also plays in helping to motivate the participants to stay in school and go to college. Like their children, school and career are

intertwined in their thinking about the program. They are independently emphasized, but the latter is seen as a potential motivating factor for the former.

To summarize, OSRP seeks to reverse what it perceives as a cycle of poverty by helping its students establish personal career aspirations and by providing job experience which can help to motivate them to succeed in school. Some of these goals are alluded to in the name of the program: Ordered School Reinforcement Program.

UNFAVOURABLE EVALUATIONS

Other data contradict the above positive evaluations of OSRP. Individually, many of the parents report that they have observed a significant 'falling off' of grades during the year that their children have been attending OSRP.

BH: What about her attitude toward school or her grades this year? Have you noticed any change from previous years?

Jen's mom: Uh, she's lost a lot of, like I said, she dropped out of bookkeeping. She couldn't do that. And ah I don't know, she, this year, I think it's just too many things going on at one time, that Jen has fallen down.

. . .

Nick's mom: Uh, up until possibly I would say this year, towards the end of last year, he always was a decent student. Uh, he never missed any, he didn't miss very many days.

. . .

BH: Why do you think he started to slip in terms of his grades now?

NM: I just think that all the sudden that he just didn't care about school. Why he didn't, I don't know. I have talked to him, you know. I've always encouraged him. As a matter of fact he was gonna drop out of school. . .

. . .

BH: Did you see any changes in Collena this year in terms of either her schooling or her attitude toward school?

Collena's mom: Yes, beginning on like a little bit. Ya, in the beginning of the year.

BH: And what's happened since then?

CM: She just don't, like she don't care.

BH: How have her grades been this year compared to previous years?

CM: Poorly, poorly. She did poorly. This last time marking has been poor. Very poor than I ever have noticed.

BH: How would you account for that?

CM: I don't know. It's just like she says: I, heck with it, forget it, it's not worth it, you know? I'm not, I wouldn't say worth it, but she said I ain't even try. You know?

These comments are representative of the overwhelming majority of OSRP parents. Their perspective is individual and biographical, reporting what they consider to be a significant decline in their children's grades within the recent past. Yet surprisingly, these parents do not blame OSRP for this phenomenon, nor do they indicate that in their opinion things might have been much worse had the program not been there to assist their children. Individually, then, they report a trend that is clarified in more 'objective' data. For this alternative perspective, I consulted the report cards of all the OSRP participants over the entire 1991-92 academic year. I was looking to see if there were any trends that either confirm or disconfirm the parents' perceptions. *Tables 1* and *2* summarize my findings.

Table 1: Trends in grades of PSRP students in 'core' subjects over the 1991-92 academic year.

Changes in Grades[2]	River City		Springfield		Total
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	
Down 10+%	5 (50%)	3 (27%)	1 (20%)	1 (14%)	10 (30%)
Down 5-9.9%	1 (10%)	4 (36%)	1 (20%)	2 (29%)	8 (24%)
Down 0-4.9%	3 (30%)	2 (18%)	3 (60%)	3 (43%)	11 (33%)
Up 0-4.9%	1 (10%)	2 (18%)	0 (0%)	1 (14%)	4 (12%)
Up 5-9.9%	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Up 10+%	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
	10 (100%)	11 (99%)	5 (100%)	7 (100%)	33 (99%)

Table 2: Average first term grades and final term grades of participants, by site and gender. (Note: a 'pass' = 65%)

	Term 1		Final Term	
River City:				
Girls	72.8%	(SD=10.2)	63.5%	(SD=17.2)
Boys	74.1%	(SD=19.1)	60.0%	(SD=19.1)
Boys & Girls	74.6%	(SD=15.3)	61.3%	(SD=17.7)
Springfield:				
Girls	77.8%	(SD=7.9)	72.2%	(SD=8.0)
Boys	69.9%	(SD=12.6)	62.6%	(SD=16.7)
Boys & Girls	74.8%	(SD=10.3)	68.5%	(SD=12.4)

[2] The reported changes in grades were obtained by subtracting students' final grades in the four 'core' subjects from their grades as reported on their first 'ten week' report card.

These data reveal a trend in the same direction observed by the parents: most of the students' grades declined rather than increased over the course of the academic year. My interviews gave the students an opportunity to report their own perceptions of their grades. Here is a sample of what they said on the topic.

BH: What about last year? Are these grades that you have here, are they down from last year or about the same?

Jen: Yes, quite a bit down.

BH: Do I get a sense that you're kind of worried about this?

Jen: Umhm.

. . .

BH: So you find these grades really bad?

Joyce: Considering what I was doing before. I mean, they're not really, really bad. But I know I can do better.

BH: How do you know you can do better?

Joyce: Cause I've done it before.

BH: Ya, okay. So what's lacking now?

Joyce: I'm not, I've been slacking off. Not doing my homework, not studying for tests, everything with my friends.

BH: So you find that, kind of, social life is kind of consuming you at this time of your life?

Joyce: It's very important to me. . . . I don't know. Just everything's more important. I mean, I'd rather be out

with my friends than staying home doing my homework.

. . .

BH: Talk to me about why you're failing.

Lamont: It's just cause of my attitude. If they tell me that I'm gonna fail, I'm not gonna pass, because of my grades and I need this and that. I'm not gonna listen to it. I just walk out.

BH: You feel that the problem is your attitude or do you feel that the problem is somehow the teachers and the school and the way it's run?

Lamont: Ya. It's mostly some of the way it's run and my attitude.

. . .

BH: Was this a bad year for you?

Kente: Most definitely. I ain't never got in this, I had never got suspended til this year.

. . .

BH: Did you get the thirty percent up in the third term?

Hakim: I didn't look at my report card.

BH: You didn't look at it?

Hakim: No

BH: Why not?

Hakim: I wasn't interested.

. . .

BH: Did your mom have a comment to you about it?

Hakim: Ya. She say you better get your grades up.

BH: Is that it?

Hakim: If you don't get em up, I'm going to make you stay in the house.

. . .

Regina: Well right now I got, all I got to do is get my grades up. Cause right now I'm grounded for my grades. And once I get those up . . .

. . .

BH: Can you try to explain to me why you weren't attending school?

Maria: It's more because I just, I felt out of place. I mean, there was no Spanish people, there was nobody. There was nothing for me here, you know. I felt as though I didn't belong here. I mean I wasn't white and I wasn't black. I wasn't either. And I knew that.

These young people offer a variety of excuses or explanations for their individual situations. But they all have one thing in common: by their own standards, they are all doing poorly in school. And yet OSRP staff perceive that the participants are in fact doing *well* now, in comparison with how they are likely to be achieving in school in future years. Listen to the three longest tenured OSRP staff members as they talk from their experience watching former students *after they leave the program*.

Gerald: They benefit tremendously from the program, and then most of them slip back quickly during the summer and

subsequent months. In a well funded world, I would make this program more available on an as-needed basis.

. . .

BH: Do you think this program is successful in what it tries to achieve?

Jane: The year they spend in this program is. . . the feedback I get during the year when I go to the teachers is, "They're all right, they're improving, they're doing great." And if they aren't, you can help them.

BH: I'm not clear.

Jane: Okay.

BH: Are you saying there's noticeable change in the students' work in school?

Jane: There is in the year that they're with OSRP. Now your question is: Do I notice it only that year?

BH: Right.

Jane: The year that they leave, ninety percent slip back simply because of family.

BH: Why would that be the case?

Jane: Well, you can't deny what's been fed to them the first thirteen, fourteen years of their life. . . But when they leave, it takes six months and they're kinda gone.

BH: Well how do you know? How are you aware of this?

Jane: I keep in touch.

BH: Oh I see, because you're in the high school all the time?

Jane: Sure. All the time. Five years I've kept in touch.

BH: And what kinds of fall off do you see?

Jane: Quitting school. The majority going back but through GED. Bad grades.

. . .

Sally: I think it's a great program, really. I would love to see it be a longer program instead of one year.

. . .

But once a program ends, it doesn't always carry over with these kids. And the next year, a lot of times in school, I don't know if it's a retroactive effect or what, but they got so much support in this program that now without it they flounder. And uh, we've got, like I would say probably fifty percent of the population really struggles when they leave the program.

I cannot tell the future. But if the observations of these staff are to be believed, schooling will continue to represent an on-going problem to most of the OSRP students. In spite of the program's emphasis on motivating students and keeping them in school, it is not experiencing success in this area. In fact, it is important to note that the two program curricula that deal most directly with academic remediation (i.e. homework assistance and structured homework time at the beginning of each OSRP session) never materialized within the program. At no point did I observe staff actively encouraging or assisting homework completion. Nor did the plans and budget for individual student

tutoring ever emerge. When I questioned the director about this, he responded that setting up a tutoring program takes a lot of time that he didn't have at the moment. He added that this is the sort of program that should properly be set up at the beginning of the year to be effective.

So the two 'academic' curricula that most directly relate to school success failed to evolve within the program. This is not to suggest that their initiation would have made a significant impact on the lack of success that most of these students experience at school. The best that I can suggest is that it might have made a difference in some cases. My point is that the program was inconsistent in attempting to meet its main goal of helping its students achieve success in schooling. The director would respond that in spite of his best intentions, he lacked resources and time. Nevertheless, academic remediation *could* have created more of a link between OSRP and school in the minds of the students. As it is, the students came to define the program as an after-school "job." The program wanted more, but was unable to achieve its goal in this key area.

Before considering some of the implications of these findings, I will include a segment of the site administrator's discussion with me on the topic of tutoring. Perhaps his attitude was responsible for the failure of the tutoring curriculum to materialize.

Stanley: But I think for most of them, to acquire better socialization skills, better interactive skills, better

comfort levels and different environmental skills, are much more critical for these kids to survive than getting the tutoring skills they may need to make it in school. . . Cause generally, tutoring has an inherent misconception. The kids don't realize at first, but it's another thing you got wrong with them. And that's why, you know, sometimes I think, ya, the kids need it. But it takes them back a step or two, too. You know, the last thing you need to be telling somebody who's overweight is, "You're fat. You come to this diet workshop." They may be happy being fat. And I'm not trying to say that tutoring, if it's affecting their grades in school to the point where they're not going to get through high school and get on to college. Yes, I don't think that's the case with many of our kids. I think they're having some difficulty. But I'd rather have the program concentrate on those kids that are going to get up from point A to point B.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION

Two things should be clear from the above data. First, OSRP has resources that are inadequate to successfully implement its own program curriculum. Second, the state, the staff, students, parents and onlookers of OSRP define the program in positive terms. Why would they do so, considering the evidence of its failure to realize its own goals? In the case of those closest to the program (e.g. the state, staff, students and parents) why

would they not ask serious questions about the program's ability to achieve its goal of school reintegration before evaluating it positively?

In responding to these questions, it is important to point out that some of these comments are grounded in evidence, and others are based on theorizing about the relationships between findings that may be defined as evidence. I will endeavour to distinguish between the two in this discussion. First, I propose that many of the participants and onlookers of OSRP view it in positive terms because they perceive it to be a solid, state run and state supported institution. Like other mainstream institutions, the degree to which its activities approximate its stated goals is rarely questioned. In a parallel research finding, Henslin (1993) reports that survivors of unusual and unfortunate tragedy turn to social institutions in times of stress. He argues that social institutions offer people assistance in defining reality, especially when alternative and uncomfortable definitions are also consistent with the situation. Seen in this way, institutions help to create their own legitimacy merely by being there, reassuring people that many others define things in a given way. This encourages people to not question these prevailing definitions, i.e. to figuratively 'join the group'.

Second, onlookers and participants support OSRP's self-definition as a successful program because they personally agree with the goals of the program itself. This is supported by many of the comments which people made to me in relation to OSRP.

Onlookers expressed a consistent theme to me in this regard, as summarized by the statement, "I think it's a great program." People observed that the staff had their "hands full" in terms of meeting their objectives with each child, but they rarely questioned the validity of the program itself. As they see it, OSRP is helping these poor, disadvantaged young people turn their lives around so that they do not have to continue within a cycle of welfare. As bystanders understand things, the young people in the program deserve this 'break', and so too does OSRP.

Third, the program is rarely (if ever) questioned by its participants and onlookers because it conforms to mainstream American values and does not question dominant institutions. Put in sociological terms, OSRP accepts the functionalist perspective which argues that socialization 'failures' require resocialization in order to integrate within dominant institutions (see Bloom, Davis and Hess, 1965; Dewey, 1966; Dreeben, 1968; and Parsons, 1959). It is understandable why many of the relatively 'privileged' middle and upper-middle class observers and staff concurred with this perspective, because they feel that they have personally benefitted from existing structural arrangements. What is notable is that almost all the students and parents (including those of African-American descent) were in agreement with this viewpoint as well.

Last, the state funding agency also came to define OSRP as a success. However, because of the program director's sensitivity concerning the state review process, he asked me to keep away from the state representative during his annual review. Since I

was dependent upon the director's good will, I respected that wish. As a result, I can only theorize about why the state's perspective of OSRP conflicts with mine. The first and most obvious difference between the state review process and mine is in the length of time devoted to observing and interviewing program participants. Seven months gives one significantly more time to develop and refine one's thinking on this issue than the one day that the state evaluator had to make his evaluation of the program.

Second, I would argue that the different theoretical orientations through which we view the program has a lot to do with the divergence in findings and evaluation at the end of our observation periods. My 'critical' orientation encouraged me to actively seek out and find evidence which disconfirmed the program's success (see Apple, 1989; Bottomore, 1964, 1965; Bowles and Gintis, 1976; Brosio, 1993; and Friere, 1970). On the other hand, data indicate that the state was using a lens which encouraged them to seek out evidence which affirmed the program's success.

This analysis logically leads one to ask which of the two competing perspectives is most 'correct' or 'accurate'? In my judgement, the egalitarian motives of the staff, the parents and onlookers are 'sincere' and yet limited. They do not question the possibility that their self-confirming and implicitly functionalist perspective may not be acting in the best interest of the young people within OSRP (not to speak of other 'at-risk' students outside the program). To the detriment of OSRP

students, they never consider society's broader structural features which act as barriers to the future success of these young people. In short, their image of the program is consistent with their broader functionalist understandings of their society as open, benign, and structured around basic values that are generally agreed upon.

The sincerity of the egalitarian motives of the state itself, however, is open to question. In support of this conclusion is my finding that the funding level of the program is inadequate to permit it to amass the resources to implement its own formal curriculum. It also fails to use existing evaluative resources reasonably or efficiently. For example, the program invests resources in gathering school grades data on each student over the year-long program, but does not utilize it in its evaluation or refunding decisions. Finally, the program has a history of see-saw funding increases and cut-backs that appear to coincide with the ebb and flow of 'urban disturbance' nationwide. The Miami riots a number of years ago led to a funding increase in OSRP's budget, followed by a slow but steady decline over several years. More recently, the Los Angeles riot associated with the acquittal of the police officers who beat Rodney King was followed by another significant increase in budget expenditures on OSRP, turning it from a one year to a two year program. It should be noted that this recent increase in budget is a rarity during a time of severe government budget constraint.

One conclusion of this author is that there is a mixture of sincerity and self-denial on the part of these agents of

resocialization. On the surface, they speak a sincere belief in the need for programs like OSRP to end the cycle of welfare dependency by certain groups in society. The staff recognize that they are fighting an uphill battle, but like the others in and around OSRP, they maintain an optimistic stature. The state curriculum speaks positively of attempting to address the needs of disadvantaged, at-risk youth. Yet implicitly, their quasi-functionalist perspective leaves them nowhere to go but to 'blame the victims' for their own 'inadequate' socialization. By assuming an individual deficit model which centers out and in effect blames the weakest members of our society for their own failure, the state fails to directly confront the systematic ways in which public education itself disadvantages disempowered groups, making compensatory education needed in the first place. The findings of this study suggest that educational policy-makers who truly want to provide equal access to educational credentials should seriously question the utility of remediation programs under their supervision. Solutions may lie in altering the structure of mainstream educational programs, rather than in providing integrative assistance to failures and potential failures.

Last, I can only reasonably conclude that the state does not really care about the outcomes of this program, i.e. that they use it as a facade to show the community how much they are doing on behalf of those in need. This is evidenced by the clear disjunction between purpose and outcome which can be ascribed to indifference at best and purposeful neglect and cynicism at

worst. This finding is consistent with other literature on the state which views social welfare programs as means of controlling the underclass. Social welfare programs are seen as expanding in times of civil unrest among lower class groups and contracting during times of calm (Piven & Cloward, 1971). This is seen as being related to the cyclical nature of the capitalist economy, as well as its inability to provide work for all who seek it. Thus, social welfare programs are made available as a means of pacification or cooptation, at the same time that they help to ensure the availability of a continuous supply of cheap labor to employers.

In short, OSRP is a specific example of America's bifurcation on the issue of providing help to those who are poor and in need of assistance. On the one hand, Americans want to believe that hard work, an independent spirit and goal-directed behavior can earn everyone a piece of the middle class pie. They often state a belief in the idea that all one needs to do to achieve success is to pick oneself up by one's bootstraps. This is associated with a sincere belief that programs like OSRP can play a useful role in reintegrating our socialization failures. On the other hand, Americans are aware from experiences like plant closings, the 1930's depression, the recent recession, and market declines that individuals cannot control all the social and economic forces around them. As I see it, OSRP is testimony to both ways of thinking about this issue. The very existence of the program is recognition of the fact that people are subject to social and economic conditions over which they have little

control. On the other hand, the assistance given is only half-hearted, revealing a torn set of feelings about helping those who on the surface appear to be healthy and young enough to be able to help themselves.

OSRP, then, is a symbol of America's inability to come to grips with the whole issue of welfare policy. Who is to blame? Who benefits most from social welfare expenditures? How shall we perceive the disadvantaged and the poor? Until the nation comes to terms with its own ambivalence on these and related questions, we should not be surprised to find a steady flow of failed social welfare programs like OSRP.

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